

Report: Tobacco companies targeted female smokers

BOSTON (AP) — Tobacco companies did elaborate research on women to figure out how to hook them on smoking — even toying with the idea of chocolate-flavored cigarettes that would curb appetite, according to a new analysis.

Researchers at Harvard University's School of Public Health said they examined more than 7 million documents — some dating back to 1969, others as recent as 2000 — for new details about the industry's efforts to lure more women smokers.

Carrie Carpenter, the study's lead author, said companies' research went far beyond a marketing or advertising campaign.

"They did so much research in such a sophisticated way," she said. "Women should know how far the tobacco industry went to exploit them."

The report, published in the June issue of the journal *Addiction*, says tobacco companies looked for ways to modify their cigarettes to give women the illusion they could puff their way into a better life.

One of the documents, a 1987 internal report from Philip Morris, extolled the virtues of making a longer, slimmer cigarette that offered the false promise of a "healthier" product.

"Most smokers have little notion of their brand's tar and nicotine levels," the report states. "Perception is more important than reality, and in this case the perception is of reduced tobacco consumption."

A Philip Morris spokesman declined to comment on the report, saying the company hasn't had a chance to fully review it.

The Harvard researchers spent more than a year sifting through an online database of internal documents made public following the 1998 settlement between tobacco companies and 46 states.

Carpenter said they found at least 320 documents that focused on women's smoking patterns, including a 1982 report from British-American Tobacco Co. that said women buy cigarettes to help them "cope with neuroticism."

"We can safely conclude that the strength of cigarettes that are purchased by women is related to their degree of neuroticism," the report stated.

Other internal studies showed that companies explored adding appetite suppressants to cigarettes.

In 1980, for instance, R.J. Reynolds Co. proposed creating a cigarette with a "unique flavor that decreases a smoker's appetite, including brandy, chocolate, chocolate mint, cinnamon, spearmint and honey."

However, researchers didn't find any evidence they followed through with that idea. Officials at R.J. Reynolds didn't respond to requests for comment.

Paul Bloom, a marketing professor in the business school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, noted that cigarettes aren't the only "sin product" marketed specifically to women.

"For a long time, they just marketed beer to men. Then they discovered women would drink it, too," Bloom said. "Now binge drinking on campus is just as big a problem with women as it is with men."

Worldwide smoking rates among women are expected to increase 20% by 2025, "driven by the growth of female markets in developing countries," while men's smoking rates are steadily declining, the Harvard report says.

Jack Henningfield, a professor of behavioral biology at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, said he hopes the report serves as a "call to action" for government officials to focus their anti-smoking efforts on women, particularly in developing countries.

"It's a time bomb," said Henningfield, director of the Innovators Combating Substance Abuse Program at Johns Hopkins. "They've got to act now to prevent the time bomb from exploding."

Carpenter said there is no evidence in the trove of documents that suggests tobacco companies have stopped targeting women.

"Without regulation from government agencies, we don't know what they're doing today," she added.

The Harvard research project was funded in part by the National Cancer Institute.